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Pragmatic utopias:

From history to our story for intentional gender-democratic and sustainable community

Helen Jarvis

Introduction

While some aspects of social and economic life have altered significantly since the industrial revolution and through the post-industrial era, domestic living arrangements remain stubbornly rooted in traditional gender roles and a rigid model of separate family dwelling. Despite persuasive feminist critique and evidence of viable alternatives (notably the Israeli Kibbutz and the extended family compounds typical of many African and Central Asian countries), the pattern of dwelling and internal arrangement of domestic space in Western societies remains conservative and inward looking. In Britain, for example, apart from the humblest accommodation for the working classes (which often had shared cooking and washing facilities), the family has been housed in a self-contained dwelling with the interior divided into a number of strongly demarcated spaces, each classified according to gender-defined activities. The norm has been established as one of conservative emphasis on privacy (Lawrence 1982) and more recently a treadmill of investment in comfort, cleanliness and convenience (Shove 2003).

The rigid separation of public and private spaces that provide exclusive facilities for small family units arguably present a major obstacle to improving the position of both women and the environment (Chouinard 1989; Seyfang 2010). We find evidence of historically entrenched male bias in architecture and town planning in the segregated geography of residential location, as well as in housing design and domestic technology. In effect, women

have been ‘kept in their place’ by the separate zoning of housing in dormitory suburbs, and residential blocks that are set apart from sites of employment and public life (Roberts 1991: 153). The ghettoization of the domestic sphere has been reproduced not only by physical separation but also by cultural norms of ‘respectable femininity’ that drive women to devote their working lives to intensive mothering and to creating the impression of an ideal home. The mundane, typically unpaid, feminised activities of feeding, clothing, sheltering and caring for family and neighbours are rendered invisible and disregarded by the ‘tyranny’ of single family dwelling (Jarvis 2013).

In turn, social and material conditions that reproduce persistent patriarchal gender relations also coincide with negative consequences for the planet. Conventional housing corresponds with higher rates of carbon emissions and energy consumption than for any individual mode of transport or industrial sector (Buckingham 2004; Crabtree 2006). A heavy housing-related carbon footprint is attributed to the wasteful separation of privatised sites of consumption. Thus, American sociologist Harvey Molotch (2003) observes that one solution to the problem of people buying excess ‘stuff’ and then facing the problem of how to reuse or recycle what is not needed is to promote collective access and use of goods and services via cooperative arrangements.

To some extent we are witnessing just such a cultural shift in a growing number of ‘sharing’ and ‘solidarity’ economies. While in some high-profile spheres of consumption (ZipCars, Airbnb etc.) mutual exchange and trust are replacing cash and ‘ownership’ as the new currency, many of these ‘niche markets of green consumption’ simply reproduce unsustainable, unjust consumption-led capitalism in novel ways (Seyfang 2010). A more radical solution would cultivate ‘efficiencies of propinquity’ through multiple households

living more collectively in the manner of a traditional village or tribe (Jarvis 2011). In this context it is illuminating to examine historical and contemporary intentional community arrangements that replace separation (fixed gender roles, fixed spatial boundaries) with creative scope for ecologically sustainable and gender democratic societies to be realised.

Indeed, scholars from many disciplines, including gender studies, environmental studies, sociology, history, geography, architecture and planning have chosen to make intentional communities the focus of research and publication; both as a category and scale of purposeful social organising and as a diverse continuum of experimentation. Varied motivations and the impulse to live communally are such that gender democracy is not always prioritised within the intentional ethos. It is for this reason that in this chapter I offer critical reflection on the positive connotations of collaboration and purpose, including the question of whether intentional communities offer the potential for *some* or *all* residents to shape and influence domestic arrangements in socially progressive and sustainable ways. For example, efforts to challenge patriarchal norms can compete -- rather than correspond -- with parallel motivations and efforts to deliver an ecological, affordable and community-based approach to housing construction (Chatterton 2013; Pickerill 2014). I argue that it is important to recognise the quest for gender equality as being discrete from ecological sustainability while also acknowledging that these intentions are not mutually exclusive. Moreover, while shared space and collective self-management can summon forth new forms of citizenship, everyday practices of home-making remain deeply implicated in relations of paid and unpaid work and this has profound implications for dimensions of difference including gender, class, disability and age.

Building differently to live differently: a pragmatic utopia

Although we tend to think of particular moments and places as ‘revolutionary’ there has never been a time when non-conformists and dissenting groups have not sought to challenge or transform the status quo to some extent. Thus, renewed interest in community ownership of housing, motivated in part by issues of affordability and supportive neighbourhoods for an ageing population, can claim earlier precedent in extensive critical writing on ‘placeless sprawl’. In the 1960s Herbert Gans published a searing indictment of what he observed as racist, sexist and homophobic intolerance in the pressure to conform in dormitory suburbs such as Levittown, USA, for example. In the absence of meaningful solidarity and association, non-traditional families including single parents and homosexual or lesbian couples, were excluded from locally constructed definitions of family (Gans 1967: 415-16). In that decade, dissatisfaction with poor access to affordable housing among low-income families led to the adoption of Community Land Trusts in the USA. Influenced by a mix of American Indian ideas on stewardship of common land and the civil rights movement, these citizen-led non-profit organisations sought to collectively purchase and manage property on behalf of the local community. The 60s became widely known as the quintessential ‘counter-cultural epoch’ because it witnessed three distinct but interdependent strands of civil mobilisation; an emerging eco-feminist movement; a transnational women’s movement, and a peace movement characterised by high-profile direct action including the illegal occupation of military sites as communal peace camps.

Scholarship on utopianism probably represents the best known, if widely misunderstood story of ordinary people building differently in order to live differently. Yet, it is misleading to interpret ‘intentionality’ in terms of a quest for ‘utopia’ as if it were a blue-print alternative or fixed goal. Utopia is a term first coined by Thomas More in the sixteenth century as ‘a play on the two Greek words that supply the ‘u’ sound, eu (good) and ou (not). When taken

together with topos (place) – the root of the second part of the word – utopia could be construed as a ‘good place’ or a ‘somewhere that does not exist’ (Gold 2008: 69; Jarvis et al. 2009). This tendency to view any imagined alternative to mainstream society as a fantasy of ‘no-place’ is problematic for the politics of challenging patriarchy and materialism in alternative models of intentional community development. Consequently, there is a move within eco-feminist scholarship to reclaim a dynamic process from the static notion of utopia more frequently used as a pejorative term (of abuse, e.g. ‘fantasy’ or ‘ego’) of naïve idealism (Schehr 1997: 30).

Ruth Levitas, for example, seeks to liberate the concept of utopia from a place and goal (of master planning), to replace it with a ‘utopian method’ of unsettling and challenging the dominant culture of the day (2007: 289). She argues that we need to pay greater attention to the dynamic process of ‘orientation’ and ‘yearning’ and to reclaim this creative journey of experimentation from the static notion of utopia. This way she recognises the process of utopian thinking as creative and transformational elements of social change; both prevalent and necessary. She reminds us that as a method of analysis, utopianism is about uncovering processes that are already entailed in experimentation: existential quests (identified as ‘looking for the blue’) coexist with a narrower utopia in political discourse that she calls ‘looking for the green’. By contrast, ‘looking for the green’ (a viable mode of living within ecological limits) requires a utopian approach that must be understood creatively ‘as a method rather than a goal’ (Levitas 2007: 290). Burke (2004) similarly argues that in order for imagination to flow there has to be space for creativity and experimentation – hence we need to critically examine the gendered power relations that arise in the process of imagining, collaborating in and realising intentional communities, noting how this may variously liberate or exclude individual women and men from creative spaces and processes.

Living together: defining intentional community

The umbrella term ‘international community’ (IC) is widely used to describe a variety of experiments in ‘living together’, as well as successive human struggles to pursue socio-spatial justice (Kanter 1976). Embedded within the intentional community tradition are expressions of resistance to dominant social norms and expectations of home, work and family life: motivations for challenging the status quo can be progressive and creative rather than solely reacting in opposition to dominant norms (Sargisson 2000).

Feminist scholars have drawn attention to progressive experiments in urban design, including collective, ideological and matriarchal communities from around the world, in an effort to theorise everyday social reproduction and space-time interdependence (Fromm 1991; 2000; Jarvis et al. 2009: 144). This approach indicates that neighbour relations are more meaningful and mutually supportive when homes and communities are co-produced; ‘self-made’ rather than ‘ready-made’. We also learn that collaborative housing offers practical as well as social support for the upheaval of life-course transitions such as separation or death of a partner or spouse, children leaving home, and all that is required in a practical sense to provide care for immediate family (Maxey 2004; Manzella 2010). This brings to mind the popular African proverb (used by Hilary Clinton as the title of a 1996 publication on social responsibility): ‘it takes a village to raise a child’. The implied ethic of shared care envisions a more harmonious, creative and just society in which children’s, older people’s and women’s needs and the social reproduction of all peoples and natures are valued as central motives for action (Jarvis 2005; Jarvis et al. 2009: 133). These are the defining characteristics of gender democracy that are reported to attract women in particular to intentional community. However, while some expressions of mutual cooperation and sharing are growing in

popularity, largely as a by-product of economic austerity and an ageing population, mainstream Western society appears unwilling to voluntarily share domestic space or household amenities ‘except in extraordinary circumstances’ (Hemmens and Hoch 1996: 17).

Emphasis on ‘intentionality’ is rooted in collaborative housing and community, in opposition to top-down notions of ‘master planning’. This is why intentional communities often pursue anti-establishment development approaches that challenge professional expertise; cultivating instead a do-it-yourself (DIY) culture of self-build and direct action. For example, in the autonomous community of Christiania which has occupied a former military site in the Danish capital Copenhagen since 1971, residents flout not only urban policies but also traditional gender roles bound up in conventional expectations of who gets to build a house where and with what method and materials. From the outset, the unspoken rule of the ‘Christiania way’ was to renovate and adapt rather than to tear down existing buildings and to build with reclaimed materials at minimum cost (Jarvis 2013). This messy and protracted craft process of self-build suggests the liberation of housing construction from its conventional association with a male-dominated commercial industry, where ‘the tools of the trade are linked to assumptions about strength and toughness, and knowledge of a particular language and code of behaviour’ (Pringle and Winning 1998: 221). The same would be true of other examples of housing restoration work, but here the skills are learned and traded through a ‘barn-raising’ collaborative ethos, against the grain of stereotyped definitions of women’s and men’s competencies (see also Pickerill and Maxey 2010).

At the same time, other intentional communities flourish as self-governing entities that were designed, but not built, by community members. The common thread to the IC definition, therefore, is collaboration to ensure that neither the individual nor the group is submerged by

the other. This excludes hierarchical, military, totalitarian or charismatic spiritual cults from this definition. As with the assumed simplicity of any umbrella term, the picture is complicated by many culturally specific ways that community groups and scholars qualify the nature of collective, communal, collaborative or cooperative association. Emphasis on intentionality (shared purpose) differentiates ‘communities which people consciously create for themselves (from) those which arise naturally through humans living or working in close proximity’ (Metcalf 2004: 8). Shared spaces for ‘living together’ are crucial to the IC definition because the potential to challenge conventional gender relations requires that community members are close enough that they can carry out a shared lifestyle, within a shared culture and with a common purpose.

Much in the way that environmentalism encompasses ‘multiple shades of green, from light to dark’ (O’Riordan 1981), degrees of sharing vary from the highest level of pooled income (such as the kibbutz or commune), to looser arrangements combining private and shared domestic resources (such as with cooperatives, ecovillages and cohousing). Groups that embrace notions of collective activity and shared physical space do not necessarily define themselves as an intentional community and the ‘label’ that is applied to any ‘alternative’ or ‘counter-cultural’ living arrangement is frequently contested. Consequently, the four main categories of IC identified in Figure 1 represent a simplified reality: by suggesting a primary motivation for each category it is easier to differentiate between the largely collective economy of the commune and the pragmatic blend of shared facilities and separate living spaces found in cohousing. In practice, it can be impossible to identify one common vision: each IC is typically motivated by several intersecting intentions (such as social justice, gender democracy, low-impact living, self-reliance, sharing, self-growth and aspects of spirituality rooted in an ethic of care). Nonetheless, it is constructive to emphasise a common vision or

purpose because it distinguishes the IC concept from a widely used ‘fuzzy’ notion of community that ‘can mean almost anything, or next to nothing’ (Metcalf 2004: 7).

Accordingly, IC is not just about sharing money, land, housing or mutual care, but also about the reason for sharing: a vision and values that are negotiated and agreed in common by consensus.

[Figure 1 about here]

The ambivalent legacy of his-story

The early origins of communal settlement and mutual cooperation can be traced as far back as Plato’s Republic in the fourth century BC and more reliably to the sixteenth century Anabaptist and Digger movements (Metcalf 1995; Coates 2007). Historical evidence helps to distinguish the quest for gender democracy as a persistent, yet frequently marginalised, impulse for alternative types of community-based housing. As already suggested, these can be understood variously as a reaction *against* hegemonic gender divisions and power relations as much as by a way of re-imagining and *creating* (as if from a blank page) a better future world. Inevitably these historical projects illustrate the way that patriarchy functions on multiple levels that cannot be reduced to an idealised ‘blue-print’ for gender democracy or equality. Time and again the stories of IC projects in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries illustrate the persistent disregard of women as active agents (‘architects’) in the process of imagining and realising alternative models. In 1830, for instance, the French philosopher Charles Fourier railed against the isolated single-family dwelling as one of the greatest obstacles to improving the position of women. He published his proposals to eradicate poverty and support women’s rights, most notably by challenging traditional marriage, affirming sexual difference and advocating education and employment based on merit rather

than sex. Indeed, he is credited with coining the feminist moniker. Yet there is little evidence of him engaging in any practical way (through consultation with women) in a female perspective. While Fourier did not practice or set out to realise his own socialist utopia (beyond a refusal to marry), his ideas directly inspired the male founders of several ICs to engineer the socialization of domestic work. For example, the Brook Farm transcendentalist community founded by Unitarian minister George Ripley in Massachusetts in the 1840s sought to distribute work and leisure equally among men and women so as to liberate time for intellectual pursuits and create harmony and balance in community relations (Hayden 1978:275; Hayden 1976).

Similarly, Ebenezer Howard, the British architect of the Garden City movement, realised a vision of inclusive urban design that was directly inspired by socialist feminist ideals popularised by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Because of his male privilege and his architectural training, Howard was able to realise Gilman's ideas in his proposal for a 'cooperative quadrangle' which was intended to release women from isolated domestic drudgery. This saw garden apartments arranged around a collective kitchen, dining room, and open space. Several quadrangles were built between 1911 and 1930, designed specifically for single female professionals, although they never became standard provision in the garden cities (Hayden 1984: 90). Gilman's intervention remained unacknowledged in Howard's published work.

Seventeenth century England was a deeply patriarchal society in which the father was the absolute leader of the family. Both the Leveller and Digger movements sought to reform hierarchical social relations with an agrarian lifestyle based on small self-reliant egalitarian rural colonies. The Levellers were a group of farmers led by the disciplined communist

Gerrard Winstanley who was known as the True Leveller. They were among the first social democrats in English history. Significantly, this movement opened up modest opportunities for women to engage in direct action such as organising demonstrations and mass petitions. Similarly, the Diggers were one of a number of nonconformist dissenting groups that emerged around this time (Beynon 2012). The Digger movement also inspired the development of hundreds of communes on the West Coast USA in 1960s (Boal et al. 2012). This model is recognised as the inspiration behind ‘back to the land’ ‘off grid’ ecovillages that have proliferated in rural areas around the world, as evident from the extensive reach of the Global Ecovillage Network, established in 1991.

While the Leveller and Digger movements sought to challenge deeply held patriarchal legal and social structures, the harsh realities of farming on land that was illegally occupied, combined with daily struggles to resist violent eviction, typically reinforced traditional gender roles that defined farming skills in terms of physical strength. Rebecca Laughton (2008) makes a similar observation in the context of those ICs today that seek to live off the land. She notes that ‘labour-intensive pre-modern’ farming practices often reinforce traditional gender roles, especially where young children or babies are present and in communities where values of local food self-reliance coincide with humanistic cultures interpreted as mother-centred such as those with extended breast-feeding (Laughton 2008: 247).

What characterised and distinguished IC formation in the 1970s was the simultaneous expression of disenchantment with mainstream material cultures and widespread international experimentation with novel forms of communal living witnessed in the USA, UK, Australia and Northern Europe. For example, hundreds of self-organising land-sharing communities

were established in Australia at this time (Curry et al. 2001), with an estimated 251 concentrated in the 'rainbow' region of North East New South Wales alone (Irvine 2003). Indeed, the 1973 Aquarius festival was explicitly modelled on the US Woodstock Music and Art Festival and this alone attracted 5000 students to an iconic community experience (Hannan 2002). Experimental developments of 'ecologically oriented community life and low cost housing' coincided with a deep restructuring of the dairy industry and this made it possible for groups of young people with very limited assets to collectively purchase cheap farmland (Dunstan 1975).

In historical terms, possibly the best known communal experiment was that of New Harmony, Indiana, USA, in the nineteenth century. This represented the second attempt by the prominent Welsh social reformer Robert Owen to build a model town based on communitarian ideals. The first and more successful of his communities was the smaller mill-town of New Lanark founded in Scotland in 1816. Owen espoused a 'community of equality' and cited three 'monstrous evils' that combined to thwart 'mental independence'; private property, religion, and conventional marriage. He described the kind of marriage he sought to promote as a 'natural marriage'. In practice, however, historical archives suggest that many women who had joined New Harmony 'in order to realize equality of the sexes' found that 'domestic chores became (their) exclusive and expected duty, despite equal education alongside men'. More significantly, in 'natural marriage' women served as 'community wives' to cook, sew and clean for the entire village (Sutton 2009: 42).

As Manzella (2010: 35) observes, while the nineteenth century was an especially fertile time for experiments in communal living, the historical record reveals this largely through popular preoccupation with sensational forms of open marriage. Thus, the Oneida Community,

located in the original homeland of the Oneida tribe, Northeast USA, under the charismatic leadership of John Humphrey Noyes, is best known for experimenting with group or 'complex' marriage in which the community (and ultimately Noyes) supervised heterosexual relations that could involve any number of members (Schaefer and Zelner 2008: 63).

Romantic attachments were discouraged (in Biblical terms) as representing selfish orientations that failed to recognise the spirit of the Pentecost (Manzella 2010: 34). In group marriage sexual equality interpreted everyone as being married to everyone else.

Whereas preoccupation with 'group marriage' remains problematic to intentional communities research, communitarian experiments have arguably had a powerful and progressive impact in the loosening of traditional heterosexual and nuclear family ties, opening up spaces and expressions for challenging 'new normal' family forms. In this sense, Manzella notes that early intentional communities served an important function in reinterpreting and adapting family ties in (post-colonial) ways to variously suit 'frontier' and 'pioneer' conditions; thus Shakers defined family as single males and females living in separate quarters with a common sense of mission, while the Oneida Colony defined family as plural marriage with shared children (2010: 40). More generally, the lasting influence of North American intentional communities from the nineteenth century is the definition of family as an extended rather than nuclear concept and of community ties other than those of blood kin. This understanding paved the way for contemporary ICs to redefine 'family as community' to compensate for what has been lost (or never firmly established) in the nuclear family. In a pragmatic sense, modern communalism reconstitutes the traditional notion of the tribe or village in order to rescue the support functions (of inter-generational care and mutual reciprocity) of the extended family that have been inadequately replaced by commercial venues and services. This does not mean the nuclear family has disappeared from

contemporary communities. Rather, it means that nuclear families may thrive within a larger non-kin family (Manzella 2010: 41-42).

Cohousing as a ‘new normal’ non-sexist neighbourhood?

Collaborative housing (also called cohousing) is a type of intentional community made up of private homes with additional shared facilities in which residents actively participate in the design, planning and governance of the community as a whole. The contemporary cohousing concept is inspired by the Swedish ‘kollektivhus’ and a similar Danish ‘living together apart’ arrangement known as *bofællesskab* dating from the late 1960s (Vestbro 1992) but it captures the enduring ideals of a much longer communal imagination. Swedish cohousing in particular emerged from a concerted effort to bring about greater equality between men and women and to support dual earning and caring roles. Common meals and other services were designed to reduce the burden of housework and to make it possible to combine personal careers based on paid employment with family and community life. In the many places around the world where the cohousing concept has taken root, commitment to shared meals is widely held as the benchmark of gender-democratic shared housekeeping.

In the Swedish context, cohousing covers fully fledged collectives (which may be funded by the state but which are governed non-hierarchically by the collective; often built as high density blocks in urban areas with a wide range of shared amenities, or rural eco-villages with separate dwellings and shared food production, and collective ‘cluster houses’ which are designed to combine fully equipped private apartments (or town-houses) with collective living space. Cohousing is intended to make it easier for neighbours to share activities such as eating together, childcare and food production such as gardening: it is increasingly popular

among older people and non-traditional families such as lone mothers (Horelli and Vepsä 1994).

Dick Urban Vestbro (1997) usefully differentiates between two periods of experimentation in collective housing in Sweden that reflect broader shifts in feminist thinking. The modernist collective housing unit or ‘family hotel’ dating from the 1930s through the 1960s featured a clear division of labour between occupants and employed staff (Caldenby and Walldén 1979). The middle class tenants employed domestic staff to provide them with meals that were paid on the basis of a monthly subscription. While the radical modernists endorsed collective housing as a means to promote equality between men and women, Vestro and Horelli (2013: 323) argue that these ‘hotels’ were based not on cooperation, but on the social division of labour. They attracted criticism for this reason as a ‘special solution for privileged people’ and the Labour party in party considered it impossible to provide subsidies to this model of collective housing (Vestbro 1982). After meal services were suspended in one family hotel, a group of women, called BIG, *Bo i Gemenskap* (‘live in community’) rejected the idea of separating productive and reproductive work. They did not agree with the modernist view that housework should be minimized. Instead they argued that cooking and caring for children together with others is enjoyable, saves time and should be regarded as a valuable contribution to society (Vestbro and Horelli 2013: 325). In this ‘self-work’ arrangement residents organise in small teams to cook for the whole community. Residents agree to share defined common tasks such as cooking, cleaning and administration by rotation irrespective of sex. This arrangement, which combines modestly apportioned private space with common facilities for shared daily use and non-hierarchical collective self-governance, became the most popular form of cohousing from the 1970s. Collaborative ‘self-work’ regimes resonate with feminist ideology of the 1960s which emphasise the

emancipatory power of solidarity in collective activity. Whether or not in practice communal kitchens are emancipatory remains the subject of debate (Schroeder 2007).

The international phenomena of cohousing can be identified by three waves of development; first, in northern European cities from the 1960s, with a view to improving the lives of working parents and their children through more efficient and egalitarian housekeeping; second, in the USA in ‘cosmopolitan’ metropolitan areas since the 1980s, with a view to recreating socially inclusive ‘traditional’ close-knit communities and building a sustainable alternative to ‘place-less sprawl’; third, in Australia and South-East Asia in peri-urban to rural areas, engaging with the ecovillage ideals to combine cohousing with strong environmental conservation measures including aspects of self-sufficiency with respect to local food production and ‘off-grid’ renewable energy (Williams 2005). A good proportion of first and second wave cohousing groups are women-only; some are intended for older women (such as the aptly named older women’s cohousing group, OWCH, in London). Some are intended for mixed seniors (usually over age 50) while the majority are intergenerational and mixed.

Cohousing in the USA can appear (both aesthetically and organisationally) to lack a radical vision: it is nevertheless highly influential both as the fastest growing form of intentional community and as a ‘new normal’ way of cultivating mutual support within and between households on a ‘parochial scale of trust and knowing’ (Lofland 1973). For example, in a study of the Elder Spirit Cohousing community in the US, Anne Glass (2009) found that 80% of senior residents turn to neighbours rather than to distant kin to facilitate local self-reliance. As another West Coast US IC resident observes; ‘lots of people are drawn to cohousing because, at its best, it’s supposed to be a beautiful blend of community and capitalism- it’s

not a commune' (Jarvis 2015: 101). In this context it is important to stress the active participation and collaboration of residents in self-governance. This is necessary to clearly distinguish cohousing from commercial condominiums or gated communities which also have common spaces and shared facilities but which do not cultivate community-based micro-structures of social organising that endow local meaning and shape to the way common spaces and facilities are used. Practical examples of social organising around sharing that characterise cohousing (in the US and elsewhere) include collective and reciprocal childcare, pooled ownership of transport and large domestic appliances, tools and machinery and cultural expectations that everyday possessions such as books, toys, recipes, and DVDs are routinely circulated on loan. On-line calendars are typically used to coordinate and apportion common-use facilities such as guest rooms for which each household has access on a time-share basis. In this sense the infrastructure of daily life in cohousing include not only the mechanisms to challenge domestic activities, possessions or roles as 'his', 'hers' or 'exclusive' but also the circuits of learning and influence that can be progressive and transformative. As one West Coast US IC resident observes, for example; "in cohousing I have a life situation and a set up that encourages me to have less stuff, to live in a small home, to share more, to live more simply....you've got a common pool of knowledge about living simply" (Jarvis 2011). This suggests that the cohousing model has the potential to transform mainstream dwelling precisely because modifies without abandoning familiar notions of privacy, property, community and sharing.

Our story: the enduring legacy of the women's peace movement

Striking parallels are revealed between the complex intersection of actors, intentions and settings needed to cultivate 'efficiencies of propinquity' and similarly sustained participation

in new social movements (Passy and Giugni 2000). Cynthia Hamilton describes the way that women's actions in the early 80s shifted the form and values of solidarity from

walking into your local CND meeting (where) it's a very bureaucratic set-up, invariably run by blokes' to a 'completely different way of doing things. We never sat in rows. We introduced ourselves and tried to keep the groups fairly small.....Everyone got a chance to express themselves and their feelings (1989: 130).

This emphasis on expressing feelings can be observed as a legacy of the 'tribal council circle', originally derived from indigenous cultures and widely adopted in the Quaker movement. The open forum of the tribal-council circle was adopted with particularly cathartic affect in the women's peace camps (Roseneil 1995). It is typical for women-only and mixed intergenerational groups to draw inspiration from the way women organised daily life in the enduring peace camps such as Greenham Common through 'highly productive intellectual openness' (ibid: 67). In a tribal council circle, a talking stick is passed around from member to member allowing only the person holding the stick to speak. This enables all those present to be heard, especially those who would feel intimidated by adversarial debate. This is evident at Twin Oaks which was founded in 1967 in rural central Virginia, USA, with a mission 'to promote secular values of cooperation, sharing, nonviolence, equality and ecology (Twin Oaks 2014). The Twin Oaks community is self-supporting economically, income-sharing and partly self-sufficient. Each member works 42 hours a week in the community's business and domestic areas. Each member receives housing, food, healthcare, and personal spending money from the community.

Conscientious listening is central to the ‘non-violent’ open communication style adopted by Twin Oaks and this combines with wider social learning. On the one hand gender democracy is manifest in terms of an absence of leadership, in a non-hierarchical gender division of labour and decision-making. On the other hand, in more subtle ways, egalitarian intentions are also instilled in a culture of non-violent community and a shared ethos that commits individual members to challenge and rewrite oppressive and sexist language and behaviour in mainstream society. In this way, ‘calm’ communication, nurturing and compassionate language becomes the superior cultural capital intended to replace the taken for granted privilege and domination of loud, confident, aggressive or intimidating voices (Flanigan, 2011; xviii). In theory at least, meeting in the circle, where there is no up or down, beginning or end, a non-hierarchical culture is enshrined which promotes openness towards each other’s concerns and emphasis on non-judgemental experimentation.

Similarly, it is important to acknowledge the influence of intersecting intentions that emphasise spiritual values because these typically provide further scope to disrupt dominant ethnocentric and androcentric assumptions. It can be argued that it is in the blurred relations between ecology and spirituality and between ecology and human sexuality that activists and scholars find the nuanced analysis of society and nature’s interrelatedness needed to re-imagine a harmonious and sustainable future (Sbicca 2012). For example, the Brazilian shamanic IC of Terra Mirim rescues the ancient lineage of the Goddess Mother as an embodied practice of people living in harmony with each other and nature. Faith rests on a spiritual-natural affective ‘encounter’ rather than institutionalised religious practice. In this context, shared rituals and ceremonies play a fundamental role in the enactment of a feminised (rather than women-only) space: visitors and residents comment on the feminine culture and ‘energy’ that the shamans claim is rooted in ‘nurture and abundance’ and

cultivated in relation to four food types; spiritual (contemplation), psychic (understanding), emotional (love) and physical (local seasonal food production and solidarity economies) (Alba Maria 2014). Elsewhere there are also examples of women-only communities such as those founded in the 1970s to practice the politics of gay rights and women's liberation in a 'separate lesbian world'. The Pagoda Community in Florida, for instance, is one of about 100 below-the-radar intentional women's communities in North America to practice a separate lesbian feminist 'utopia' on grounds of matriarchy (Unger 2010).

Summary and concluding remarks: re-imagining gender democracy

Intentional communities are frequently viewed as 'laboratories for testing and demonstrating new ideologies and social structures' (Forster 1998: 39). Yet, as I have shown in this chapter, there has generally been limited theorising of the gender norms and relations constructed and reproduced in a group setting where order and action is shaped by shared arrangements for daily living. Research has drawn attention to resource sharing within virtual communities (such as freecycle) (Nelson et al. 2007), for specific populations of students and young professionals (Heath and Kenyon 2001) and institutional or semi-institutional health care facilities (Parr 2000), but not situations of collaboration in building, funding and managing community-based housing (but see Vestbro and Horelli 2013 specifically on cohousing). Further research is needed to examine the extent to which regional cultures of patriarchy, individualism and competitiveness are modified in a group setting by governance practices intended to replace 'macho' adversarial agenda-setting practices with creative and compassionate dialogue rooted in conscientious listening.

Home and community are major sites of consumption, waste and inequality and the contradictions and dilemmas of 'idealised' Western material cultures of home-making raise

significant concerns for the promotion of ‘green’ homes. This chapter situates renewed interest in novel forms of collective and communal living, notably intentional communities, in a well-rehearsed critique of the ‘arrested development’ of mainstream, private single family dwelling. The umbrella term ‘intentional community’ was introduced in Figure 1 as encompassing four ‘types’ of shared space and collaboration (communes, cooperatives, cohousing and ecovillages). This typology highlights an interdependent scale of dwelling that challenges sexist and materialistic living arrangements by attempting to combine and redistribute productive and reproductive work between households. While it is entirely possible to design village-like communities within cities, rarely do ‘master-planned’ ‘urban village’ developments take the ‘soft infrastructures’ of participatory governance into account. This is why it is instructive to explore the ambiguous intentions and multiple realities of gender equality and ecological sustainability in this communal setting. Notions of solidarity and autonomy help distinguish the vision of sharing and participation in cohousing from historical examples of totalitarian or ideologically exclusive communes.

Perhaps inevitably, evidence from the historical record and contemporary demonstration communities reveal a mixed picture. The social scale relations of sharing, collaboration, and consensus governance are complex, fragile, and difficult to ‘engineer’. Notwithstanding the recurring motivation of distaste for misogyny and materialism and enduring efforts to subvert the conventional nuclear family and single family home, we find paradoxical evidence to suggest that ‘back to the land’ sustainability initiatives can serve to reinforce traditional gender roles because the environmental agenda overshadows issues of social justice. Similarly, emphasis on non-violent consensus-based communication can reinforce gender separated rather than inclusive egalitarian group setting. The social and material networks that cultivate conviviality and sharing in a consensus community setting are not always

benign or sufficient to combat persistent gender inequalities. Even when ideological commitments to gender equality are widespread in the intentional community group, gender divisions can be normalised and taken for granted by the way democratic social relations and cooperation are enacted. While sexist attitudes are challenged in outward displays gender imbalances are witnessed in the persistent undervaluation of the emotional labour most frequently constructed as ‘women’s work’.

Cohousing represents a pragmatic grass-roots movement that has grown out of dissatisfaction with individual dwelling. While it accounts for a tiny fraction of new housing construction in the UK, USA, and Australia, it is the subject of growing political attention and popular desire. While it may not prove to be the most ‘radical’ model of collective living over the long term, it represents a plausible shift toward fundamentally rethinking how and where people live, to promote sustainability and gender justice?, in the future. The energy efficiency arguments alone (fewer building materials, combined heat and power) are compelling; added to these are the need to address the social isolation and absence of reciprocal welfare characteristic of the rising number of smaller households, many with high support needs. The challenges facing groups wishing to establish alternative, gender democratic, sustainable cohousing or more radical communal arrangements are nevertheless daunting and the failure rate of ICs is high. In large part this is because, unlike mythical utopias, intentional communities are not island states. As one resident of an Australian rural IC observed “it’s almost like you have to kind of keep shaking the other world off to come into this one (of negotiation, sharing and consensus” (Jarvis 2015: 101). This scale of intentional community reflects regional cultural variation that function through multiple scales of history, patriarchy, and state welfare regulation. In short, while there are numerous practical examples of the way shared intentions, collective work, and participatory

democracy foster non-exploitative mutual support, this is a fragile scale of welfare and self-reliance that is prone to depletion, especially when hollowed out by debt, ageing, disability and a political economy that renders social reproduction work invisible by the privileged status assigned to wage employment.

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